



DMHAS Update

February 2023

Message from Commissioner Nancy Navarretta

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With February being Black History Month, it is important to note that only one in three Black adults who need mental health care receive it. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Mental Health Facts for African Americans guide, Black adults are also less likely to receive guideline-consistent care, less frequently included in research, and more likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists). This underscores the importance of community and cultural competence when it comes to finding mental health support.

Read on for more important resources and news from the Department and, as always, if you have any questions or suggestions please feel free to get in touch.



Black History Month Annual Luncheon

Join us on Tuesday, March 7, as we celebrate the return of the Black History Month Annual Luncheon. The event will feature delicious food from Hot Pot restaurant and Mr. Leonard Epps, an esteemed former Hartford educator and longtime participant in this luncheon, will be providing African drumming. Our keynote speaker, Justice Raheem Mullins, was nominated to the Supreme Court in 2017, and has the distinction of being the youngest person to be nominated to the Supreme Court. Special thanks to our OOC Multicultural Celebrations Committee for hosting this important event!



NATIONAL THEME: BLACK RESISTANCE

RESCHEDULED
FROM 2/28

Tuesday, March 7, 2023
470 Capitol Ave (near cafe)
Conf. Rooms A, B, C
12:00 PM

TICKET COST: \$20

Deadline for \$20 ticket price is Tuesday, February 21



Keynote Speaker:
Judge Raheem Mullins

Community Collaboration

River Valley Services and Middletown Police Department Work Together to Support Increased Behavioral Health Needs in the Community



L to R: Captain Brian Hubbs (Patrol Division Commander), Erik Costa (Chief of Police), Kristin Sorlie, LCSW (RVS CSWA), Richard Davis (Deputy Chief)

February 7th, 2023 marked the one-year anniversary of the collaborative work between River Valley Services (RVS) and Middletown Police to implement a CIT Social Worker within the Department. RVS clinician Kristin Sorlie, LCSW, is embedded in the police department to jointly respond with police to crisis calls in the community. This CIT model promotes strong partnerships among law enforcement and behavioral health providers to support individuals and families in the community struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.

An embedded social worker can be instrumental in reducing some of the workload on officers while supporting those with mental health needs. The collaboration improves community relations, can decrease repeat calls to the police department, and also provides day-to-day education regarding mental health and substance use issues to the officers themselves.

Since its inception, Kristin has responded to 361 calls needing face to face assessment, 256 police requests for Emergency Evaluation and has provided follow-up services to 223 individuals and families.

“The partnership between RVS and the Middletown Police Department has made an impact on our city by giving our officers a new awareness of mental health and services we can provide to our most vulnerable populations,” said Chief of Police Erik Costa. “The implementation of this program has decreased use of force situations, provided timely services, and has developed a better well-rounded officer, by working side by side with mental health professionals. This is an example of community outreach that truly makes a difference.”

Danbury Police Department Crisis Intervention Team

[\(click to play\)](#)



Legislative Update

The DMHAS Legislative Unit is excited to welcome Kelly Ramsey-Fuhlbrigge. Kelly joins DMHAS with a wealth of experience at the State Capitol negotiating the legislative process. Mary Kate Mason will assist Kelly during the legislative session as she acclimates to her new role.

The Connecticut General Assembly convened the 2023 legislative session on January 4, and since it falls on an odd-numbered year, it will be a “long” session for budget negotiations and implementation, and will last until June 7, 2023. Due to the pandemic, this session will again be conducted using a hybrid method, meaning hearings will be conducted both in person and via Zoom. To watch all the action that occurs at the Capitol during hearings or sessions of the House and Senate virtually you can tune into YouTube or [CT-N](#).

The Governor has unveiled his proposed Budget, and he has again prioritized mental health and significant funds to support our services are included. The full budget bill and addendum are available for review:

- [Governor Lamont’s Budget Proposal For the FY 2024 – FY 2025 Biennium](#)
- [Governor’s Recommended FY 2024-2025 Budget – Program Addendum](#)

DMHAS budget highlights include:

- \$2.7 million for the Discharge and Diversion Program
- Over \$3 million to fund the New 988 Suicide Hotline
- \$500 thousand new caseload growth for the Young Adult Services Program in each year of the biennium
- Over \$1.2 million to support the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Demonstration. (Funding reallocated from the Substance Use Disorder Waiver Reserve account in the Department of Social Services) to enhance Pregnant Parenting Women programs.
- Over \$1.2 million to support contractual obligations for Beacon Administrative Services Organization Contract for the Behavioral Health Partnership

For more information, and ongoing updates, please visit our [DMHAS Legislative Unit page](#).

Gambling Prevention Update

For the past six months, [DMHAS Problem Gambling Services](#) and the [Connecticut Regional Gambling Awareness Teams](#) have been working with [Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America \(CADCA\)](#) to utilize the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) through a gambling prevention lens.

This training program provided strategies for applying SPF Assessment to gambling prevention, understanding the nature of local gambling problems and community conditions, identifying focus populations, and assessing community readiness.

On Tuesday, February 7, 2023, participants came together in-person to conclude the training series with CADCA’s Master Trainer, Dorothy Chaney. Connecticut is the first state to pilot this training program and we are excited to see gambling prevention efforts reach new heights on a national level.



Prevention Corner

DMHAS Prevention Director Sarju Shah and Program Manager Kelley Edwards recently attended the 2023 CADCA (Community-Based Advocacy-Focused Data-Driven Coalition-Building Association) National Leadership Forum in Washington, D.C. Joining Sarju and Kelley were seven CT Fatherhood Agency Prevention Program Coordinators, and four CT Prevention Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTASC) Specialists.



In the last year, DMHAS has provided funding for seven CT Fatherhood Programs to hire a prevention coordinator as well as funding for TTASC to provide essential training and technical assistance in prevention to these programs. The Fatherhood Program prevention coordinators culminated their prevention learning experience with attending the CADCA Forum, and being immersed in prevention and mental health data, resources and best practices from prevention specialists across the United States, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Center for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Attended by nearly 4,000 prevention professionals, the CADCA Forum provided attendees with the most current opioid overdose prevention information, impactful ideas for expending opioid settlement funding, information and best prevention practices for communities with legalized adult-use cannabis sales, strategies for reducing underage drinking, and how to engage all sectors of the community in prevention, and much more. The opportunities to network with other professionals were vital as well. There was a Connecticut state meeting held, at which approximately 60 Connecticut prevention professionals and youth convened to share contact information and ideas.

CADCA Forum attendees had the opportunity to meet virtually with federal legislators and their staff during Capitol Hill Day. The Fatherhood Prevention Coordinators spoke with Representative Joe Courtney and the assistants to Senators Murphy and Blumenthal. Being able to share their prevention experiences as well as the current needs of fathers in Connecticut communities was a meaningful experience for all.

The information obtained at the forum will be incorporated into the work of the Prevention and Health Promotion Division. The data and practices shared from across the country will inform our committees and policy recommendations. Stay tuned for further information as we move forward.

COVID-19 Assistance for Community Health (COACH) 2.0 Wrap-Up

Commissioner Navarretta joined DMHAS staff and community “coaches” in celebrating the success of the COACH program, which connected our most vulnerable residents with community caseworkers who helped to secure critical social services and behavioral health resources during the pandemic.

Seeing the impact the COVID-19 pandemic was having on our fellow residents, we knew we had to act quickly to help those in need of further support by connecting them with the resources they needed most. In June of 2020, COACH 1.0 was established thanks to the commitment, hard work and quick action of our community providers. In short order, our partners hired 23 crisis counselors and 2 Team Leads to offer emotional support, psychological first aid, and linkage to other vital resources and supports.

While these services were available to all residents of Connecticut impacted by the pandemic, COACH specifically focused its outreach efforts on those populations that were significantly affected. Older adults, who were struggling with isolation from family and friends, also had a higher risk of complications from COVID. Persons experiencing homelessness were having a more difficult time accessing shelter services due to reductions in space as well as a lack of access to timely guidance about COVID and PPE. COACH also focused on the faith-based community, who needed support in learning about, and connecting to, additional resources.

While COACH 1.0 offered brief psychological support and resource linkage, the feedback that we were receiving indicated that those supported by this program needed longer term intervention. Thus, COACH 2.0 altered its focus to serve as more of a traditional case management program, managing the complexities of people impacted by the pandemic who needed longer term human connection, care, and linkage with other social services and behavioral health resources. In its first 18 months, COACH 2.0 provided case management services to over 1,100 people. To broaden our reach, our partners at the O'Donnell Group stood up an active media campaign with printed materials, the [ctstronger.org website](https://ctstronger.org), billboards, television and radio ads, and social media. Since its inception, the COACH website has amassed nearly a quarter of a million visits and 230,000 engagements.

This critical work could not have been accomplished without the support, dedication and commitment of the all of the coaches, supervisors, and leadership of our community providers. Thanks to our partners for their role in impacting the lives of the people you connected with: BH Care, Bridges, Community Health Resources, Community Mental Health Affiliates, Family and Children's Agency, Ministerial Health Fellowship, McCall, Mental Health Connecticut, Wheeler, United Services, United Way and the O'Donnell Company.

For more information, please visit ctstronger.org/covid-19-support.

